

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
THERAPIST SELF-DISCLOSURE**

by

LINDA MARY BASSON

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR PHILOSOPHIAE (PSYCHOLOGY)

In the Faculty of Arts
(Department of Psychology)

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
PRETORIA

Pretoria

July, 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my children, *Monique, Megan, and Antoni*.

I wish to express sincerest gratitude to the following people:

My supervisor, *Dr. Assie Gildenhuis*, who I have always respected for his academic integrity, and whose earnestness and judicious feedback has made supervision and the authoring of this thesis a challenging and personal growth-enhancing experience.

Mrs. Lourett Visser and *Mrs. Marie Swanepoel*, for their amicable and professional assistance with the literature searches, and in securing inter-library loans.

Mr. Johan Daffue who kindly assisted with electronic data transfer to *Dr. Gildenhuis* while he was on sabbatical leave in London.

My parents for their unflagging faith in me, and particularly my father who meticulously revised the grammar and spelling of each chapter.

My husband, *Hannes*, whose gentle spirit and whose devotion and nurturing has instilled in me the confidence and tranquillity to complete this thesis.

I feel deeply indebted to each of the *therapists* who willingly gave of their time for the interviews. Without their sensitive responsiveness and candour this study would not have been possible.

"Life is fuller than words. Words are poor and clumsy tools, though each of them is precious. Those who write constantly struggle to put black marks on a page, trying to signal a meaning to distant readers. Sometimes, the marks seem woefully inadequate. Often, in trying to express the experiences and meanings most important to us we keenly feel the limitations of our skills. The determination to get meanings into words--and to get them exactly--is thoroughly demanding. One key to its practice is to keep one's eye on the actual living of life, and not merely on other sets of words."

Michael Novak

"There are two modes of knowing, those of argument and experience."

Roger Bacon

Title: **A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THERAPIST SELF-
DISCLOSURE**

Student: Linda Mary Basson

Promoter: Dr. A.A. Gildenhuis

Department: Psychology

Degree: Doctore Philosophiae (Clinical Psychology)

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of therapist self-disclosure within the psychotherapeutic context. The need for this focus unfolded during a literature review comprising three parts. Firstly, the quantitative research within the counseling context was reviewed. These studies were subject to rigorous experimental conditions, and by nature of their application reveal an unintentional by-passing of the contextual and professional embeddedness of self-disclosure. There is also an exclusive focus on the client's experience.

Secondly, the role of therapist self-disclosure was considered in terms of theoretical orientation. The existential-humanistic and the psychoanalytic traditions were focused on. In this focus the polarization within the literature, in terms of the nature of the therapist's involvement and the use of self-disclosure, was appraised. Contemporary trends within psychoanalytic paradigms were discussed at length. A review of central psychoanalytic concepts points towards changing conceptualizations of the therapist's stance and use of self, and these were discussed at length.

Thirdly, the practical implications of therapist self-disclosure, specifically the various types and their indications and contraindications, were deliberated on. This review underscores the difficulty in extricating self-disclosure from its relational context co-constituted by

patient-related and therapist-related characteristics.

To account for the therapist's experience within the disclosing context, a phenomenological method of enquiry was employed. A pilot study assisted the researcher in more efficient interview management and in formulating a research question that would most adequately reach the therapists' experience.

Four protocols were selected for phenomenological explication. The descriptions presented with an unusual quality. There was an infiltration of psychological language and the therapists were inclined to theoretically validate, confirm, and mould their beliefs about their therapeutic stance and about self-disclosure. This yielded a new method of analysis with significant points of departure from the traditional Duquesne research tradition.

The results are presented in the form of an integrative text which accounts for all of the individual variations of the experience of self-disclosure. Due to its nascent and process character, the essential characteristics of this experience are presented within processional themes. The unfolding of the therapists' tumultuous experiences upon encountering, engaging, and assimilating the disclosure are described in a unified way.

This study concludes with an overview on the methodology and a re-evaluation of the results. The extensive deliberation on both the process of analysis and the method is described. Suggestions for conducting phenomenological research with psychotherapists are presented. Pitfalls and recommendations pertaining to the method employed are considered. Validation comprises an important component of this discussion and serves as a point of departure for extending the method.

The results are discussed in two ways, firstly, in terms of the most outstanding characteristics of the experience of self-disclosure as elucidated in this study, and secondly, in terms of their expansive contribution in unveiling the neglected dimensions of self-disclosure. A conceptual shift in terms of self-disclosure and implications for training and supervision are also considered.

Key terms: individual psychotherapy; existential-humanistic; psychoanalysis; therapist self-disclosure; counselor disclosure research; therapeutic relationship; experience; qualitative research; narrative data; contextual framework.

Titel: 'n FENOMENOLOGIESE STUDIE VAN DIE TERAPEUT SE
SELFONTHULLING.
Student: Linda Mary Basson
Promotor: Dr. A.A. Gildenhuis
Departement: Sielkunde
Graad: Doctore Philosophiae (Kliniese Sielkunde)

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie is om die belewenis van die terapeut se selfonthulling binne die psigoterapeutiese konteks te omskryf. Die behoefte hieraan het gedurende 'n literatuuroorsig, bestaande uit drie dele, ontstaan. Eerstens is kwantitatiewe navorsing binne die voorligtingsraamwerk bestudeer. Hierdie studies is aan streng eksperimentele vereistes onderworpe. Die aard van die toepassing hiervan, ontsluit 'n onopsetlike vermyding van die kontekstuele en professionele verweefdheid in selfonthulling. Daar word uitsluitlik gefokus op die kliënt se ervaring.

Tweedens is die rol van die selfonthulling van die terapeut in terme van teoretiese oriëntasie oorweeg. Die fokus is op die eksistensieël-humanistiese en psigoanalitiese tradisies gerig. Dit is gedoen om die polarisasie in die aard van die terapeut se verhoudingsbetrokkenheid en die gebruik van selfonthulling binne die literatuur te evalueer. Huidige sienings binne psigoanalitiese paradigmas word intensief beoordeel. 'n Oorsig van die grondliggende psigoanalitiese begrippe dui op veranderende gedagtes omtrent die terapeut se posisionering binne die terapeutiese verhouding en die gebruik van die self.

Derdens is die praktiese implikasies van die terapeut se selfonthulling en meer spesifiek die verskeie tipes selfonthulling en hulle indikasies en kontraïndikasies beoordeel. Hierdie oorsig lig die probleme, in die losmaking van selfonthulling van die verhoudingskonteks wat

gesamentlik, die pasiënt en terapeutverbonde kenmerkendheid uitmaak, toe.

'n Fenomenologiese navorsingsmetode is gebruik om rekenskap van die terapeut se ondervinding binne die onthulling te gee. 'n Loodsstudie het die navorser gehelp met 'n meer doeltreffende hantering van die onderhoud en om 'n navorsingsvraag, wat die terapeut se ondervinding die beste aanspreek, te formuleer.

Vier protokolle is vir die fenomenologiese onthulling geselekteer. Die beskrywings het 'n buitengewone kwaliteit. Sielkundige terme is ingewef en die terapeute was daartoe geneig om hulle oortuigings ten opsigte van hulle posisionering binne die terapeutiese verhouding en selfonthulling teoreties te toets, bekragtig en te modelleer. Hierdie buitengewone kwaliteite van die protokolle het gelei tot 'n nuwe analise wat gedeeltelik afwyk van die tradisionele Duquesne navorsingsmetode.

Die resultate word as 'n geïntegreerde teks wat al die individuele variasies van die selfonthullingsbelewenis vervat, weergegee. Die ontluikende en ontvouende aard lei daartoe dat die kerngedagtes van hierdie belewenis binne professionele temas aangebied word. Die ontvouing van die terapeut se ontstuimige belewenis tydens die ontmoeting, betrokkenheid in, en verwerking van die onthulling, word saamgevat in 'n beskrywing.

Die studie sluit af met 'n oorsig van die metodologie en 'n beoordeling van die resultate. Die uitgebreide deliberasie oor die metode van analise en die inhoud word beskryf. Aanbevelings ten opsigte van die uitvoering van fenomenologiese navorsing met psigoterapeute word aangebied. Die geldigheid van die metode is 'n belangrike deel van hierdie bespreking en dit dien as 'n vertrekpunt vir die

verryking van die metode.

Die resultate word op twee maniere bespreek; eerstens in terme van die uitstaande kenmerke van die belewenis van selfonthulling en tweedens in terme van die uitbreidende bydrae om die verwaarloosde dimensies van selfonthulling toe te lig. 'n Verskuiwing in die konseptualisering van selfonthulling en die implikasies betreffende opleiding en supervisie word ook bespreek.

Sleutelbegrippe: individuele psigoterapie; eksistensieël-humanisties; psigoanalities; selfonthulling van terapeut; navors van voorligter selfonthulling; terapeutiese verhouding; belewenis; kwalitatiewe navorsing; beskrywende data; kontekstuele raamwerk.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. The unfolding of the research problem.	5
1.2. Bibliography.	11
 CHAPTER TWO: A BRIEF RESEARCH REVIEW.	 13
2.1. Introduction.	13
2.2. A research review.	16
2.2.1. The dyadic effect.	18
2.2.2. Clients' perceptions of disclosing counselors.	19
2.2.3. Self-disclosing versus self-involving statements.	20
2.3. A critical evaluation of the research.	23
2.3.1. Methodological flaws.	24
2.4. Summary: Appraisal and implications.	27
2.5. Bibliography.	29
 CHAPTER THREE: THERAPIST SELF-DISCLOSURE AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION.	 35
3.1. Introduction.	35
3.2. An existential-humanistic view of therapist self-disclosure.	37
3.2.1. Introduction and philosophical assumptions.	37
3.2.2. The nature of the therapeutic relationship.	42
3.2.2.1. The shift from transference to encounter.	44
3.2.2.2. Congruence.	47
3.2.2.3. Unconditional positive regard.	49
3.2.2.4. Empathy.	50
3.2.2.5. Implications for therapist	

	2
self-disclosure.	52
3.2.3. Summary.	60
3.3. A psychoanalytic view of therapist self-disclosure.	61
3.3.1. Introduction.	61
3.3.2. Paradigms and the therapist's participation in the therapeutic situation.	63
3.4. Psychoanalytic concepts and the therapist's participation.	70
3.4.1. Analytic stance.	70
3.4.2. Transference.	77
3.4.2.1. Implications for therapist self-disclosure.	86
3.4.3. Countertransference.	88
3.4.3.1. The character disorders: neutrality, transference, and countertransference reappraised.	95
3.4.3.2. Clinical uses of the countertransference: Implications for therapist self-disclosure.	104
3.4.3.3. Summary.	116
3.5. Describing the nature of the therapeutic relationship: Summary and integration.	117
3.6. An overview.	124
3.7. Bibliography.	125

CHAPTER FOUR: THERAPIST SELF-DISCLOSURE: A PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE AND INTEGRATION.	139
4.1. Introduction.	139
4.2. The types of therapist self-disclosure.	139
4.2.1. Disjunctive or anti-therapeutic self-disclosures.	141
4.2.2. Externally based self-disclosures.	143
4.2.2.1. Disclosures bearing on the	

real relationship.	144
4.2.2.2. Disclosures bearing on the transference relationship.	144
4.2.2.3. Disclosures bearing on the countertransference.	147
4.2.3. Internally-based self-disclosures.	148
4.3. Indications and contraindications for the use of self-disclosure by the therapist.	151
4.3.1. Indications.	152
4.3.1.1. Therapist-related factors.	152
4.3.1.2. Patient-related variables.	154
4.3.1.3. The nature of the therapeutic relationship.	159
4.3.1.4. Types of self-disclosure.	162
4.3.2. Pitfalls and contraindications for the use of therapist self-disclosure.	168
4.4. Summary.	170
4.5. The problem formulation reappraised.	173
4.6. Bibliography.	175
 PART TWO: RESEARCH THEORY, APPLICATION, AND RESULTS.	 183
 CHAPTER FIVE: DESCRIBING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH.	 183
5.1. Introduction.	183
5.2. The phenomenological approach to research.	183
5.2.1. A few comments on philosophical assumptions underlying phenomenological research.	184
5.3. Format of phenomenological research.	188
5.3.1. Researcher's stance: The shift from the natural- to the philosophical attitude.	189
5.3.2. Steps in phenomenological research.	192
5.3.3. Comments on the validation of	

phenomenological research.	195
5.4. Bibliography.	198

CHAPTER SIX: THE PILOT STUDY AND THE FORMULATION OF A

METHOD OF EXPLICATION.	202
6.1. Conducting the pilot study.	202
6.1.1. Introduction.	202
6.1.2. Engaging the phenomenological epoch.	203
6.1.3. Formulating the research question.	204
6.1.4. Selection of subjects.	204
6.1.5. The data-generating situation.	206
6.1.6. Feedback from co-researchers and researcher observations during the pilot study.	207
6.1.7. Re-appraisal of the research question.	208
6.2. Method of explication.	209
6.2.1. Introduction.	209
6.2.2. The nature of obtained descriptions.	210
6.2.3. Selection of protocols for phenomenological analysis.	211
6.2.4. Formulating the analytic procedures.	212
6.2.4.1. Nature of selected protocols.	212
6.2.5. Scientific explication of protocols.	213
6.2.5.1. Delineation of segments to be analyzed.	213
6.2.5.2. Detailed method of explication.	214
6.2.6. Bibliography.	227

CHAPTER SEVEN: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS. 230

7.1. Protocol one.	230
7.2. Meaning units, re-articulated meaning units, and central themes.	243
7.3. Narrative tableau.	271

7.4. The experience of therapist self-disclosure: A binding text.	276
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.	296
8.1. Introduction.	296
8.2. A reflective glance at the methodology.	296
8.2.1. Unique attributes of protocols obtained from psychotherapists.	296
8.2.2. Methodological management of unique attributes of descriptive material.	299
8.2.2.1. Descriptions wrought with psychological language.	299
8.2.2.2. The mingling of positioning- and incidental descriptions.	300
8.2.2.3. Simultaneous discussion of incidents.	303
8.2.3. From index to descriptive "narrative tableaux".	305
8.2.4. From detailed narrative tableaux to the binding text.	307
8.2.5. Reflection on methodology: The binding ingredient.	311
8.3. A discussion of the results.	312
8.3.1. A description of the pre-eminent constituents of the self-disclosing experience.	313
8.3.2. The neglected face of self- disclosure.	320
8.4. Critical appraisals and recommendations.	325
8.4.1. Methodology revisited.	326
8.4.2. Therapist self-disclosure revisited.	333
8.5. Integrative overview.	335
8.4. Bibliography.	337
ADDENDUM.	1